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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 000240

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR GG AF KG UP RS

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH DFM KARASIN JANUARY 30:
GEORGIA, AFGHANISTAN, CENTRAL ASIA-MANAS, UKRAINE

REF: STATE 8443

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Deputy Foreign Minister Grigoriy Karasin told Ambassador January 30 that the GOR hoped for more flexibility and a move away from "unilateralism" by the new Administration. He said, while the international community could discuss the status and future of the region, Georgia needed to understand there was no military solution to the situation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the best way to restore stability was for Georgia to establish normal relations with the two enclaves. He expressed support for a UN and OSCE presence in the respective zones, and said Russia favored something between a substantive resolution and a technical rollover of the UNOMIG mission. He privately told the Ambassador that as long as the OSCE office in Tskhinvali reported directly to Vienna, not to or through Tbilisi, it should be possible to reach an agreement. Karasin argued Morel's proposal to reestablish a plenary session in Geneva, without Abkhazia and South Ossetia, could lead to another failure of the talks. He stressed Russia was putting pressure on Abkhazia and South Ossetia to agree to the incident monitoring and response mechanism in Geneva, but stressed Russia's influence was not "unlimited." He noted that if the OSCE and UN missions were operating well, there was no need for frequent missions in Geneva. He said Russia was only repairing "three berths" at Ochamchire for use by its Coast Guard, not establishing a naval base, and claimed Russia had fulfilled all the requirements of the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement, while repeating complaints that Georgia had not.

¶2. (C) Summary continued. Karasin said Russia "absolutely supported" joint efforts to normalize the situation in Afghanistan. In response to the Ambassador's concern over reported Russian pressure on Kyrgyzstan over Manas Air Base, Karasin said the U.S. and Russia needed to have a "separate conversation" on the larger question of U.S. military presence in Central Asia, and on the "facilities and capacities" that Russia and the U.S. have in the region to support operations in Afghanistan. He intimated that the issue of Manas would be discussed during Kyrgyz President Bakiyev's visit to Moscow. Karasin expressed concern about the U.S.-Ukraine Charter of Strategic Partnership and asked for more information on the elements relating to the gas transport system and a U.S. diplomatic representation in Crimea. End summary.

U.S.-Russian Relations

¶3. (C) Karasin said that the GOR saw a new chance for improving U.S.-Russian relations. They hoped the U.S. would

show more flexibility and move away from "unilateralism," especially on global and regional problems. The U.S. role and strength were important, but should be put in a global context. The Ambassador agreed that flexibility on both sides would be important, and noted the new Administration's commitment to dialogue and working with partners to find common ground.

Georgia

¶4. (C) The Ambassador stressed that the U.S., EU and Russia needed to work together to bring about peace and stability in the region, and expressed concern about the continuing violence and the Russian presence in Perevi and Akhalgori. He emphasized the need to reach agreement on UN and OSCE mandates for the observer missions.

¶5. (C) Karasin said the main problem was that Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the one hand, and Georgia on the other, had different agendas. The former were trying to improve life and conditions in their regions, while Georgia's insistence on trying to reestablish its territorial integrity and return displaced persons, and failure to fulfill the terms of the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement by returning its forces to their barracks, were creating a dangerous environment. Georgia needed to understand (as the Europeans did) that a military solution would not work, and the only way to achieve stability was to establish normal relations with the "countries" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He expressed concern about provision of military equipment to Georgia.

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The Ambassador responded that the U.S. had been fully transparent about our return of Georgian equipment, and urged Russia to continue toning down statements about the U.S. "rearming" Georgia.

¶6. (C) In response to the Ambassador's objection to his use of the word "countries," and note that Russia was the only state in the region that had recognized the two enclaves, Karasin said Russia was interested in maintaining an international presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but wanted the new situation regarding the two zones reflected in the International Organizations' documents. The Ambassador pushed back, stressing that Russia could not expect the Georgians to agree to anything that suggested they accepted the independence of the two zones. Karasin said that Russia's recognition of the two enclaves meant only one thing: protection of Abkhazia and South Ossetia against further Georgian aggression. This was why Russia was content that Nicaragua was the only other country that had recognized the two.

UN, OSCE, EUMM, Geneva

¶7. (C) Karasin said he hoped the UN and OSCE mandates could be agreed in time for the February 17-18 meeting in Geneva. In the full meeting, he said Russia wanted a "fully substantive" UN Security Council Resolution, which should incorporate ideas from previous resolutions, but also include new ideas, such as taking into account the 1994 Moscow Agreement. (Note: In a one-on-one discussion following the meeting, Karasin amended his description, saying Russia was looking for something "in between" a technical rollover and a substantive resolution).

¶8. (C) The OSCE mandate was more complicated because the South Ossetians still were suspicious of the OSCE believing the OSCE had not prevented Georgia's "aggression." Russia, Karasin said, kept insisting to the South Ossetians that the OSCE mission should have access to South Ossetia. In response to the Ambassador's question, he said that if the eight monitors in South Ossetia found the need for "three or four" more people, Russia would consider it. The Greek proposal was a good beginning. The mission in Tskhinvali

should not be "a branch of some office in Georgia," but should be an independent office of the OSCE, with a different name, reporting directly to Vienna. In a one-on-one with the Ambassador at the end of the meeting, Karasin said if the Georgians could move away from the position that the Tskhinvali office had to report to or through Tbilisi, it should be possible to agree.

¶ 9. (C) Karasin welcomed the signing of the memorandum of understanding on the EU Monitors, but stressed that the point in the memo calling for moves by the Russian side should instead refer to the South Ossetians.

¶ 10. (C) Karasin expressed support for the incident monitoring and response mechanism, which he said "must" be agreed upon in Geneva. He emphasized the importance of lines of communication between the EU, OSCE and UN representatives. In preparation for the Geneva meeting, he said Russia was pressuring Abkhazia and South Ossetia continually to agree to the mechanism, but "our influence is not unlimited." Karasin contended that EU special envoy's proposal to redo the format of the Geneva meeting, including reestablishing a plenary session without Abkhaz and South Ossetia, followed by a larger session including the two enclaves in their individual capacities, could cause the talks to fail as the first ones had. If Abkhazia and South Ossetia were not included in the plenary, Russia would also not participate, and if the Abkhaz and South Ossetians found Morel was preparing new formats, they would not go to Geneva.

¶ 11. (C) Karasin said that Russia considered the Geneva process important and was not seeking to "break it," but believed that if the UN and OSCE missions were working well, there would be no need for frequent meetings in Geneva. Russia did not want a process "just for process' sake." He added that the Georgians needed to stop provocative actions in Geneva, such as bringing "alternative" representatives like Sanakoyev. The Ambassador stressed the importance of the meetings in Geneva as the only place where the Georgians, Abkhaz and South Ossetians could meet and seek flexibility.

Ochamchire, Russian bases

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¶ 12. (C) The Ambassador expressed concern at reports that Russia was seeking to build a naval base in Ochamchire, noting that this, together with an expanded Russian military presence at the Gudauta base and Upper Khodori Gorge were seen as provocative and exacerbated tensions. Karasin said reports about Ochamchire were exaggerated; Russia was merely overhauling three existing berths to allow the stationing of three Russian Coast Guard vessels. Nobody was seeking to base the fleet there. He argued that Russia had fully fulfilled the terms of the August 12 and September 8 Agreements; the forces in the two zones were there by agreement with the governments of those two regions. Russia was not hiding the fact it wanted bases in the two zones to protect them. Ambassador reiterated that plans to station over 7000 Russian troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia violated the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreements.

Afghanistan-Manas-Central Asia

¶ 13. (C) Karasin reiterated President Medvedev's statement of support for increased U.S.-Russian cooperation on Afghanistan, saying Russia was in favor of joint efforts. Karasin avoided a direct response to the Ambassador's concern over reports that Russia was pressuring Kyrgyzstan to end the U.S. presence at Manas Air Base (reftel); Karasin said the U.S. and Russia needed to have a "separate conversation" on the question of U.S. military presence in Central Asia, a subject which was "bigger than Manas." The Central Asian countries "needed to be free to decide about the presence of

other countries on their territories." We should discuss and coordinate the "facilities and capacities" that Russia and the U.S. have in the region to support operations in Afghanistan. He initially said the issue of Manas would be discussed during Kyrgyz President Bakiyev's visit to Moscow, but later backtracked, saying the focus would be economic matters, but "some political-military issues" would likely be addressed. The Ambassador noted the February 10-11 consultations on Afghanistan in Moscow would be a good opportunity to discuss these issues, but reiterated that pressure over Manas ran counter to Medvedev's expression of strategic support for U.S./NATO efforts in Afghanistan.

¶14. (C) Karasin explained that he and the MFA CIS Directorate would continue to be responsible for political matters related to Central Asia and the Caucasus. The new Federal Agency for the CIS, recently created within the MFA, would address humanitarian, economic and cultural matters, including the compatriots' question.

Ukraine

¶15. (C) Karasin expressed concern about the U.S.-Ukraine Charter of Strategic Partnership, saying there were three schools of thought about it: 1) it was a gesture by the outgoing Administration in compensation for not getting a NATO MAP; 2) it was an indication of support for NATO membership for Ukraine; and 3) it was simply a declaration of status. In any event, Russia was concerned by two items and would appreciate additional information on U.S. intentions regarding: 1) the elements relating to the gas transport system, and 2) the establishment of a U.S. diplomatic presence in Crimea.

¶16. (C) Karasin said he expected Russian-Ukrainian relations to improve, as they had already hit the bottom. Russia and Ukrainian officials continued to meet, and the GOR was concerned by Ukrainian provocations such as its claims about the Holodomor. But he thought the gas agreement would hold, although President Yuschenko was sending ambiguous signals.

Comment

¶17. (C) In a brief one-on-one discussion following the meeting, Karasin stressed the difficulties posed by Russia's "Abkhaz and South Ossetian friends," asking us to counsel "restraint" on the Georgian representatives to avoid "blow-ups or walk-outs" which were in no one's interest. He referred to unspecified pressure to de-emphasize the Geneva process (implicitly from elsewhere in the GOR) and reiterated the need to agree on the incident monitoring mechanism as an

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antidote to such pressure. Clearly, Karasin feels Geneva is under the gun to move from a discussion forum to something that produces tangible outcomes.

BEYRLE